

Message Text

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TO /SECSTATE WASHDC 6240

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 10897

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT ET

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA SINCE THE DECLARATION OF SOCIALISM

SUMMARY. SINCE THE DECEMBER 20, 1974 DECLARATION OF ETHIOPIA SOCIALISM, THE PROVISIONAL MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (DIRG) HAS CONTINUED IMPLEMENTING ITS SOCIALIST DESIGNS AT A RAPID PACE. THE PATTERN IS NOW CLEAR. WEALTH AND PROPERTY WILL BE REDISTRIBUTED TO THE PEASANT CLASSES, PRIMARILY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASSES. ALTHOUGH THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL OPPOSITION TO THE PMAC, BOTH FROM ETHNIC/TRIBAL GROUPS AND FROM THOSE WHOSE WEALTH IS BEING CONFISCATED, THE LACK OF LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION AMONG THESE GROUPS HAS PREVENTED THEM FROM TAKING THE CONCERTED ACTION THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO REPLACE THE DIRG. THE GREATEST POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE DIRG'S RULE CONTINUES TO BE FOUND IN SOME OF THE DISENCHANTED MILITARY UNITS. THERE APPEARS NO ALTERNATIVE, AT
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THE PRESENT TIME, TO MILITARY RULE, EVEN THOUGH THE NAMES AND FACES

MAY CHANGE. END SUMMARY.

1. AS HAS BEEN REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, SINCE THE DECEMBER 20, 1974 DECLARATION THAT ETHIOPIA WOULD BE A SOCIALIST COUNTRY, THE DIRG HAS, IN RAPID SUCCESSION, NATIONALIZED BANKS AND INSURANCE COMPANIES, PROCLAIMED A FAR-REACHING RURAL LAND REFORM PROGRAM, NATIONALIZED MANY PRIVATE BUSINESSES AND SOME MEANS OF PRODUCTION, AND NATIONALIZED

URBAN LAND, INCLUDING ALL ADDITIONAL HOUSES OTHER THAN THE ONE RESIDENCE ALLOWED TO FAMILIES. IN ADDITION TO THESE MAJOR PROGRAMS, THE EPMG HAS INSTITUTED DEVELOPMENT, PARTICULARLY SELF-HELP, PROGRAMS IN THE RURAL AREAS, INCLUDING THE NATIONAL WORK CAMPAIGN, AND ATTEMPTED TO REFORM THE GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY, INCLUDING REVENUE COLLECTION PROCEDURES. IN ITS RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL, THE GOVERNMENT HAS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, INITIATED A DEFICIT FINANCING PROGRAM. AS PART OF GOVERNMENTAL REFORM, A LARGE NUMBER OF MIDDLE LEVEL TECHNICIANS IN THE BUREAUCRACIES HAVE BEEN APPOINTED TO POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP. ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE, AND ARE CONTINUING, TO DECENTRALIZE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION. WITH THE FORMULATION OF STANDING MILITARY COURTS MARTIAL, THE GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING TO ACCELERATE THE CREAKY JUDICIAL PROCESS WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION FOCUSED ON CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT. OTHER GOVERNMENT MEASURES, TAKEN WITH A VIEW TO IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE LOWER CLASSES, INCLUDE A REDUCTION IN RENT, PARTICULARLY AT THE LOWEST RENTAL LEVELS, AND PRICE CONTROLS ON CERTAIN STAPLE ITEMS. SEVERAL RELIABLE SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE DIRG INTENDS TO IMPOSE GUIDELINES ON MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM WAGES WHICH WOULD ALSO BENEFIT PRIMARILY THE LOWER CLASSES. IT SHOULD BE NOTED HERE THAT MANY OF THE ABOVE CHANGES (LAND REFORM, GOVERNMENT REFORM AND DECENTRALIZATION, ETC.) ARE IN LINE WITH RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, BOTH BY THE AMERICAN MISSION AND OTHER FOREIGN ASSISTANCE ADVISORS, AS BEING NECESSARY FOR ETHIOPIAN DEVELOPMENT. AS A RESULT OF THESE REFORMS STILL IN PROGRESS AND THE DIRG'S COMMITMENT TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT, ETHIOPIA HAS MADE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS IN ITS DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY.

2. THESE REFORMS HAVE NOT BEEN WITHOUT COST, HOWEVER. BECAUSE OF THE RAPIDITY OF THE CHANGES AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED, A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION OPPOSES THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. IN ADDITION TO THE ERITREAN AND AFAR INSURGENCIES, A CONFIDENTIAL

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BOARD SPECTRUM OF OPPOSITION GROUPS HAVE SPRUNG UP IN THE COUNTRY-SIDE (SEE ADDIS 9875 AND 10167). MOST OF THESE GROUPS ARE CONSERVATIVE EX-LANDLORDS BUT THERE IS ALSO OPPOSITION FROM THE LEFT, FROM ORGANIZED LABOR, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND FROM MANY DISSATISFIED MILITARY UNITS WHICH ARE STILL SEEKING REDRESS FOR MANY LONG-STANDING GRIEVANCES, AND RELIEF FROM THE EFFECTS OF THE ERITREAN FIGHTING. THERE IS ALSO A GOOD DEAL OF LOCALIZED OPPOSITION TO THE DIRG'S PROGRAMS FROM RURAL CLERGY WHO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL

INFLUENCE ON THEIR PEASANTRY. IN CONTRAST, THE CENTRAL CHURCH OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN SO DOCILE AS TO LEND CREDENCE TO THE MANY REPORTS THAT A "DEAL" HAS BEEN STRUCK; THE DIRG AGREEING TO REFRAIN FROM CRITICIZING THE CHURCH IF THE LATTER REFRAINS FROM OPPOSING/SUBVERTING DIRG PROGRAMS. IN ORDER TO CONTROL THIS OPPOSITION, THE DIRG HAS IN EFFECT SUSPENDED MOST CIVIL LIBERTIES AND HAS MADE ARBITRARY ARRESTS TO POTENTIAL OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME. IN MANY CASES, THESE ARRESTS APPEAR TO BE BASED MERELY ON THE ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION OF THE ARRESTEES. REPORTEDLY SOME OF THOSE ARRESTED HAVE LATER BEEN EXECUTED, PERHAPS EVEN SUMMARILY. WHILE TEMPORARILY KEEPING THE LID ON, THESE MEASURES SERVE TO FURTHER ANTAGONIZE OPPONENTS. IT SHOULD BE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT EXECUTION WITHOUT TRIAL DOES NOT DIFFER GREATLY FROM THE HAILE SELASSIE REGIME'S FIXED TRIALS; THE DIFFERENCE BEING MORE ONE OF FORM THAN CONTENT, WHICH SHOULD NOT BE OVER-EMPHASIZED IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT. THE WIDELY ACCLAIMED FREEDOM OF SPEECH WHICH FOLLOWED THE FEBRUARY-MARCH 1974 EVENTS HAS BEEN ELIMINATED AND AS ONE MEDIA REPORTER PUT IT, "THERE IS 100 PERCENT MORE CENSORSHIP NOW THAT UNDER HAILE SELASSIE." INDEED, ONE SELDOM SEES THE SELF-CONGRATULATORY ENCOMIUMS ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND THE "BLOODLESS REVOLUTION," PREVIOUSLY SO MUCH IN EVIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED PRESS, EXCEPT FROM SYCOPHANTS ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR REVOLUTIONARY CREDENTIALS BY WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR. AS RESULT OF THE DIRG'S ACTIONS AGAINST THOSE VOICING OPPOSITION, THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF APPREHENSION AND EVEN FEAR AMONG THOSE IN SENSITIVE POSITIONS OR THOSE CONNECTED WITH THE FORMER REGIME. THIS TRANSLATES INTO BUREAUCRATIC RELUCTANCE TO MAKE DECISIONS AND A DESIRE TO BUCK ALL DECISIONS UP TO THE DIRG. (HAVING IMPRISONED HIGH-LEVEL EMPLOYEES BECAUSE OF INADEQUACIES IN THE PRICE CONTROL PROGRAM, THE DIRG CAN EXPECT LITTLE INITIATIVE IN DECISION-MAKING FROM OTHER CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES.) AREAS WHICH THE DIRG HAS GIVEN PRIORITY TO, HOWEVER, AND ON WHICH THEY FOCUS, GET IMMEDIATE ATTENTION AND FAST ACTION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 10897

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT ET

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA SINCE THE DECLARATION OF SOCIALISM

3. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED FROM A SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT, THE PMAC HAS MOVED CLOSER TO IDENTIFYING WITH OTHER SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY YUGOSLAVIA, WHILE STILL MAINTAINING A CORRECT, BUT LESS CLOSE, RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US. ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE SENIOR CIVILIANS REMAIN OPEN AND FRIENDLY TO AMERICANS, THE DIRG IS WIDELY PERCEIVED AS NOT FAVORING SUCH A RELATIONSHIP, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE SOCIALIST (ANTI-CAPITALIST, ANTI-IMPERIALIST) RHETORIC IN THE MEDIA. EVEN THIS HAS BECOME LESS VIRULENT OF LATE, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES APPARENT FAILURE TO RESPOND TO ETHIOPIAN ASSISTANCE REQUESTS WHICH HAS INCREASED DIRG RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF WESTERN AID. ALTHOUGH MANY OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT THE DIRG IS NOT UNFRIENDLY TOWARDS THE US, CONFIDENTIAL

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THESE STATEMENTS SOMEHOW FAIL TO APPEAR IN THE PRESS NOR DO THEY FILTER DOWN TO THE COMMON PEOPLE. THE FACT THAT WE MAINTAIN A MILITARY FACILITY ON ETHIOPIAN SOIL (KAGNEW AT ASMARA) IS NO DOUBT AN EMBARRASSMENT TO A NON-ALIGNED SOCIALIST COUNTRY BUT IT TOLERATED PROBABLY BECAUSE OF ETHIOPIA'S DEPENDENCE ON AMERICAN ARMS SUPPLIES. INDEED, IT FREQUENTLY APPEARS THAT AMERICAN DEVELOPMENTAL AID IS INCONSEQUENTIAL IN TERMS OF INFLUENCING DIRG OPINIONS, AS COMPARED TO OUR ROLE AS ARMS SUPPLIER.

4. IN THE NEAR FUTURE, IT APPEARS THAT THE DIRG WILL CONTINUE INSTITUTING REFORMS DESIGNED TO BENEFIT THE RURAL POPULATION, EVEN WHILE ATTEMPTING SIMULTANEOUSLY TO IMPLEMENT AND CONSOLIDATE ITS PREVIOUS REFORMS. ITS DEVELOPMENT GOALS WILL BE HAMPERED BY THE MANY AND VARIED OPPOSITION GROUPS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WHICH WILL OPPOSE EVERY PROJECTED REFORM. A GOOD DEAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FINANCIAL RESOURCES WILL BE DEVOTED TO ARMING THE MILITARY TO COMBAT THESE INSURGENTS, PARTICULARLY IN ERITREA, AND TO COUNTER A FEARED SOMALI ATTEMPT TO OCCUPY DISPUTED TERRITORY BY FORCE. FOR THE NEAR TERM, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO GROUP OTHER THAN THE ARMY WITH THE POWER AND ORGANIZATION TO RULE ETHIOPIA. ALTHOUGH THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION THAT A REPUBLIC WITH A CIVILAIN PRESIDENT WILL BE PROCLAIMED DURING THE UPCOMING REVOLUTION DAY ANNIVERSARY (SEE SEPTTEL), WHATEVER INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP GOVERNS ETHIOPIA, AT LEAST IN THE NEAR TERM, WILL DO SO ONLY WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY.

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